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ON PAGE A-4

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'Goldfish Bowl' Hampers Progress on Intelligence

By MARTY BONVECHIO

Staff Writer

Intelligence work in the United States is like working in a goldfish bowl, a former intelligence officer said Monday. It's too easy for people to find out what's going on.

Maj. Gen. Jack Thomas is the chairman of the Association of Former Intelligence Officers and a consultant to the Department of Defense on intelligence matters. He discussed the issues of government leaks and media coverage of intelligence matters at the Fourth National Intelligence Symposium, sponsored by the Naples Daily News.

The symposium, held at the Naples Beach Hotel, was coordinated by AFIO. It featured four speakers plus a surprise visit from CIA Director William Casey. The symposium ended in the afternoon with a panel discussion which allowed the audience to ask questions of the former intelligence officers.

"WE TEND TO live in a goldfish bowl — unlike other intelligence groups," Thomas said.

He said there is a cadre of authors and reporters who will publish anything on intelligence and the CIA that they can discover.

Thomas said publishing sensitive information hurts the effectiveness of U.S. intelligence groups.

"We'll never know how many people didn't come forward with information for fear that their names would be exposed," Thomas said.

He added that other foreign intelligence services also are afraid to cooperate with the United States for fear of exposure in the U.S. media.

Because the U.S. intelligence community operates under the review of several committees and the U.S. Attorney General, any covert work is subject to leaks to the media, Thomas said.

THE FOREIGN Intelligence Advisory Board, the President's Intel-

ligence Oversight Board, and a House and Senate select committee oversee the work of intelligence agencies. Thomas said the groups evaluate the effectiveness of intelligence work and the legality of the activities.

"We have a lot of people looking over our shoulders," he said.

Although Thomas said intelligence groups must learn to function in the goldfish bowl, he added that he hoped a sense of improved discipline could be developed within the government.

Anyone who disagrees with any aspect of the CIA's work can leak information to the press. With the information made public, any planned covert action is destroyed.

"We need a revival of a sense of discipline within those with access to information," Thomas said. "Our intelligence capabilities are part of the blade of the U.S. sword."

Thomas also discussed his worries about the future for U.S. intelligence groups. The Gramm-Rudman proposal of budget cuts could seriously hurt intelligence agencies, he said.

"Intelligence is not a required expenditure like Social Security," he said. "It's a discretionary expenditure."

The department underwent serious budget cuts in the 1970s. But in the last six years, the course changed and intelligence department budgets have expanded.

"Will the U.S. stay the course?" Thomas asked. "This is a serious concern."